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LISTING OF CLAIMS

No amendments to the claims are submitted with this paper. The following listing of

claims is presented solely for the Examiner's convenience:

1. (Previously Presented) A surgical instrument and instrument introducer assembly for

facilitating the insertion of the surgical instrument into a cavity or a body opening of a patient,

comprising:

a surgical instrument for performing a surgical procedure; and

an instrument introducer assembly including:

a tubular body portion defining a lumen therethrough, the tubular body

portion having a proximal end and a distal end; and

a distal end portion secured to the distal end of the tubular body portion,

the distal end portion defining a pocket having an annular wall with an axial

length such that the annular wall of the pocket is substantially in contact with an

outer surface of the surgical instrument along substantially the length of the

pocket and including a substantially planar distal end wall configured and adapted

to stretch and conform to a shape of the outer surface of the surgical instrument to

facilitate passage of the surgical instrument in a sealing relation to the surgical

instrument;

wherein the surgical instrument stretches the distal end portion of the instrument

introducer as it is advanced therethrough.

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2. (Original) The instrument introducer according to claim 1, wherein the distal end

portion includes an annular side wall depending from an outer terminal edge thereof.

3. (Original) The instrument introducer according to claim 2, wherein the distal end

portion is made from an elastomeric material.

4. (Original) The instrument introducer according to claim 2, wherein the distal end wall

of the distal end portion includes an aperture formed therein.

5. (Original) The instrument introducer according claim 4, wherein the aperture is

coaxially aligned with a central longitudinal axis of the tubular body portion.

6. (Original) The instrument introducer according to claim 4, wherein the distal end

portion is secured to the distal end of the tubular body portion such that the annular side wall at

least partially overlaps the distal end of the tubular body portion.

7. (Original) The instrument introducer according to claim 6, wherein the distal end

portion is secured to the distal end of the tubular body portion such that the annular side wall

completely overlaps the distal end of the tubular body portion.

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8. (Original) The instrument introducer according to claim 4, wherein a proximal

terminal edge of the annular side wall of the distal end portion is secured to a distal terminal edge

of the distal end of the tubular body.

9. (Original) The instrument introducer according to claim 7, wherein the distal end

portion is secured to the distal end of the tubular body by at least one of fusing, overmolding,

gluing and bonding.

10. (Original) The instrument introducer according to claim 4, wherein the tubular body

portion is fabricated from polypropylene.

11. (Original) The instrument introducer according to claim 4, further including a flange

extending radially outward from the proximal end of the tubular body portion.

12. (Original) The instrument introducer according to claim 3, wherein the distal end

wall of the distal end portion is provided with a region of weakened strength.

13. (Original) The instrument introducer according to claim 12, wherein the region of

weakened strength includes at least one of score lines, perforations, webbing and reduced

thickness.

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14. (Previously Presented) The instrument introducer according to claim 4, wherein the

distal end portion has a frustoconical profile including a concave annular side wall.

15. (Previously Presented) A surgical instrument and instrument introducer assembly for

facilitating the insertion of the surgical instrument into a cavity or a body of a patient,

comprising:

a surgical instrument for performing a surgical procedure; and

an instrument introducer assembly including:

a hollow elongate cylindrical body including a distal end portion

terminating in a distal edge and a proximal end portion, the cylindrical body

defining a central longitudinal axis; and

an elastomeric cap secured to the distal end portion of the cylindrical

body, the cap defining a pocket having an annular wall with an axial length such

that the annular wall of the pocket is substantially in contact with an outer surface

of the surgical instrument along substantially the length of the pocket and

including a substantially planar distal end wall having an outer terminal edge and

an annular side wall depending from the outer terminal edge thereof, the distal

end wall including an aperture formed in the pocket configured and adapted to

stretch and conform to a shape of the outer surface of the surgical instrument to

facilitate passage of the surgical instrument therethrough in a sealing relation to

the surgical instrument, wherein a center of the aperture is coaxially aligned with

the central longitudinal axis;

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wherein the surgical instrument stretches the aperture of the distal end wall of the

instrument introducer as it is advanced therethrough.

16. (Original) The instrument introducer according to claim 15, wherein the cylindrical

body is configured and adapted to receive a surgical instrument therethrough.

17. (Original) The instrument introducer according to claim 15, further including a

flange extending radially outward from a proximal terminal edge of the proximal end portion of

the cylindrical body.

18. (Original) The instrument introducer according to claim 15, wherein the cap is

secured to the distal end of the cylindrical body such that the distal end wall of the cap is spaced

a distance from the distal terminal edge of the cylindrical body.

19. (Original) The instrument introducer according to claim 15, wherein the cap is

secured to the distal end of the cylindrical body such that a proximal terminal edge of the annular

side wall is secured to the distal terminal edge of the cylindrical body.

20. (Previously Presented) The instrument introducer according to claim 15, wherein the

distal end portion has a frustoconical profile including a concave annular side wall.

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21. (Previously Presented) A method of introducing a surgical instrument into a cavity

or a body opening of a patient, comprising the steps of:

providing a surgical instrument for performing a surgical procedure;

providing an instrument introducer assembly, wherein the instrument introducer includes

a hollow tubular body having a distal end portion and a proximal end portion defining a lumen

therebetween, and a resilient cap secured to the distal end of the tubular body, the cap defining a

pocket having an annular wall with an axial length such that the annular wall of the pocket is

substantially in contact with an outer surface of the surgical instrument along substantially the

length of the pocket and including a substantially planar distal end wall having an aperture

formed therein;

inserting the distal end of the instrument introducer into the cavity or body opening of the

patient;

inserting the surgical instrument into the lumen of the tubular body of the instrument

introducer through a proximal end of the tubular body; and

advancing the surgical instrument through the lumen of the tubular body of the

instrument introducer thereby stretching the instrument introducer such that the aperture of the

distal end wall stretches and conforms to a shape of the outer surface of the surgical instrument

until a distal end of the surgical instrument projects out through the aperture of the cap, wherein

the cap creates a seal around the perimeter of the surgical instrument extending therefrom.

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22. (Previously Presented) A method of introducing a surgical instrument into a cavity

or a body opening of a patient, comprising the steps of:

providing a surgical instrument for performing a surgical procedure;

providing an instrument introducer assembly, wherein the instrument introducer includes

a hollow tubular body having a distal end portion and a proximal end portion defining a lumen

therebetween, and a resilient cap secured to the distal end of the tubular body, the cap defining a

pocket having an annular wall with an axial length such that the annular wall of the pocket is

substantially in contact with an outer surface of the surgical instrument along substantially the

length of the pocket and including a substantially planar distal end wall having an aperture

formed therein;

inserting a distal end of the surgical instrument into a proximal end of the tubular body of

the instrument introducer;

inserting the distal end of the surgical instrument, having the instrument introducer

placed thereon, into the cavity or body opening of the patient; and

advancing the surgical instrument through the instrument introducer thereby stretching

the instrument introducer such that the aperture of the distal end wall stretches and conforms to a

shape of the outer surface of the surgical instrument until the distal end of the surgical instrument

projects out through the aperture of the cap, wherein the cap creates a seal around the perimeter

of the surgical instrument extending therefrom.

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23. (Previously Presented) A surgical instrument and instrument introducer assembly for

facilitating the insertion of the surgical instrument into a cavity or a body opening of a patient,

comprising:

a surgical instrument for performing a surgical procedure; and

an instrument introducer assembly including:

a tubular body portion defining a lumen therethrough, the tubular body

portion having a proximal end and a distal end; and

a distal end portion secured to the distal end of the tubular body portion,

the distal end portion defining a pocket including:

a substantially circular distal end wall having a diameter

smaller than a diameter of the tubular body portion; and

an annular wall depending from the circular distal end wall

to the tubular body portion, wherein the annular wall is configured

and adapted to contact an outer surface of the surgical instrument

and facilitate passage of the surgical instrument therethrough;

wherein the distal end wall of the distal end portion includes an aperture formed therein

configured and adapted to stretch and conform to a shape of the outer surface of the surgical

instrument in a sealing relation to the surgical instrument, wherein the surgical instrument

stretches the aperture of the distal end wall of the instrument introducer as it is advanced

therethrough, and further wherein the aperture has a smaller diameter than a diameter of the

circular distal end wall, and wherein the aperture is provided with a region of weakened strength.